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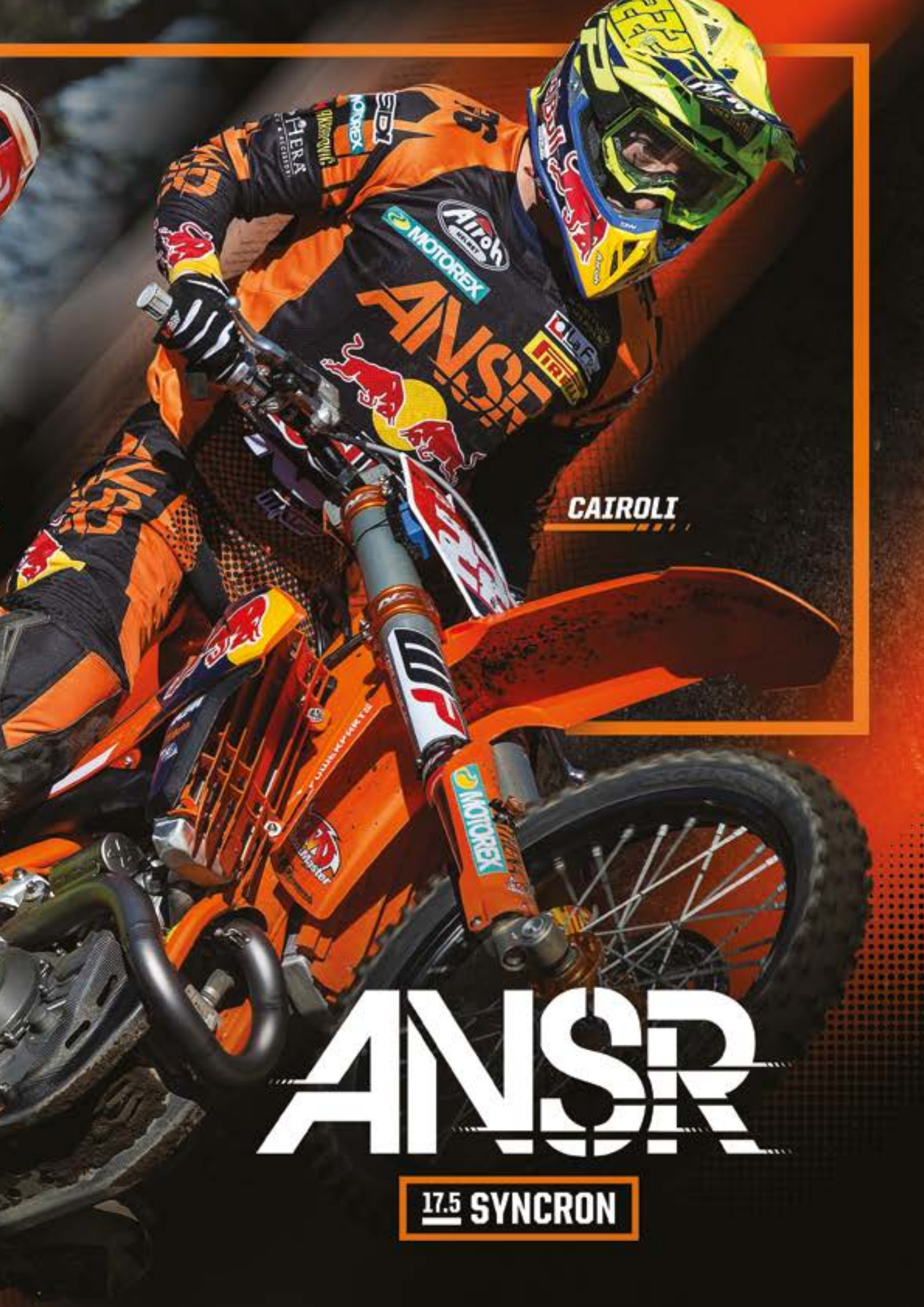
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MXGP and MX2

Story Geoff Meyer images Bavo Swijgers and Ray Archer

Heading into the Grand Prix of Trentino this weekend, a handful of riders are looking strong and at the front end of the MXGP and MX2 championships. Four rounds into the series we have three GP winners in each class, Antonio Cairoli, Shaun Simpson and Tim Gajser in MXGP and Pauls Jonass, Jeremy Seewer and Thomas Covington in MX2. Just when it looked like Cairoli would take control like in the past, Gajser turned up and made the opposition, Cairoli included look slow.

World MXGP champion Gajser has really found his mojo and his perfect rounds in Argentina and Mexico have shown he is once again the man to beat in the 2017 series.

“I am really happy. I felt good all weekend in Mexico, I was enjoy it and having fun on the bike. Actually, in the second moto it was tough as Cairoli was pushing me all the way and also the track became really hard and slick in some places but I am really happy that I won that one and the overall as well. I am really looking forward to the next one already. I haven’t changed anything in what I do, I am just having fun on the bike and I think that is key.

American Thomas Covington came to Mexico a little down on confidence, but will now head to Trentino next weekend with a mental state stronger than many of his competition.

It was one of the best GPs of my career. I felt good throughout the weekend and that helped me stay focused and do my own races. Following our qualifying race win we had a great gate pick for the final motos. I didn’t get the best of starts in moto one but got my head down and managed to get fourth. My start was a lot better in moto two. I got the holeshot and soon found myself in second behind Jonass. I spotted some good lines and was able to make my move for the lead

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a few laps later. Winning the second moto and getting the overall victory is a great confidence booster. We had a rough start to this championship but things are a lot better now. I'm looking forward to the races to come.

The legend Antonio Cairoli of the Red Bull KTM Factory team knows that it's a long season, and before Argentina and Mexico he was in fact the man to beat. He will be strong in Trentino and many of the other European rounds.

"I'm really happy because that track in Mexico was one of the tracks on the calendar where I always struggle to find a rhythm. The second moto was a little better, even if I was a bit tired with asthma, and I could stay with Tim and we pulled away from the others. I couldn't make a pass in the first moto and the result today could easily have been a 2-2. We still have to improve something to be closer to Tim. I'm confident and I know I can ride well but the goal is always to start at the front and that's very important in MXGP at the moment."

Double GP winner in 2017, Pauls Jonass had a big crash that caused him a lot of discomfort, but he will be good this coming weekend.

"I was really disappointed about my crash on the last lap of warm-up, and had to have some stitches and aesthetic so in the first race my hand was a bit numb. I made a few mistakes and it was difficult to ride. I had a really good start

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MXGP
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in the second race and led for a while. So, fourth overall and it could be better but I salvaged some points."

The red plate owner in the MX2 class, Suzuki factory rider Jeremy Seewer should be happy with himself, and he is.

"I did everything that I said I wanted to do in Mexico. I just let it happen and the results came out well. I had a really good start in the first moto, we knew that I could do that after yesterday so I was pleased with that. Then I just put in some fast laps and felt good on my bike, I made a gap, and then took the win comfortably. It was nice to take a win in normal conditions, after my first victory which was in the mud in Indonesia. The second moto, I had the same start in mind but it didn't quite work out as well. I was pretty confident to get it done but sometimes it just doesn't work out right. Still, I was in a decent spot, it was just hard to see the track and finding lines to pass those guys. Finally, I got to behind Julien Lieber and Jonass in fourth and then I passed Lieber which would have given me the overall, but I wanted to pass Jonass too. I got really close behind him, but that's when I made a mistake. I went a little bit off my lines, came off the bike but avoided the crash. It wasn't too bad, I lost a position though before I got back on and that dropped me back to fourth, which is where I finished.

Now onto Italy and another completely different scenery and track for the riders of the toughest most diverse motocross series in the world.

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Doubling Up

Story Geoff Meyer images Ray Archer

American racer Thomas Covington has scored his second Grand Prix victory last weekend in Mexico, adding to his 2015 GP win in the same country. After a slow start in Qatar, Indonesia and Argentina, the rider from Alabama came alive in Leon, Mexico, and proved to himself that he does belong at the very top of the MX2 podium. We caught up with Covington after his long flight back home, and as he settled into his comfortable home in Lommel, Belgium. He gave us 10 minutes of his time before getting a well earnt rest.

Motocross Illustrated: Getting that second GP win, I mean you had won one, but I guess until you win two, it's a little like maybe the first one was a bit lucky. Does winning two give you more confidence.

Covington: For sure, especially that second moto, it was one of the best moto's of my career so far. Just in the fact I really had to work for it. The track conditions, well, it wasn't a mud race. It is nice after having so much bad luck the first three rounds. It's good to have something like that, just what I needed.

Motocross Illustrated: I spoke to Danny Laporte (former world motocross champion) about the track, and he mentioned it was a track that needed a lot of concentration, and obviously winning on a track like that, that is really difficult, that has to be the icing on the cake. I mean if you win on a track that suits you well, that's easier, although it seems like Mexico is good for you. Does that give even more satisfaction, because you really had to be controlled and mentally strong?

Covington: I don't really know, and I haven't thought about that part of it much. I have done well in Mexico, and

some people said the track was like a Southern Californian track, hard pack, but it really is something different. They watered it a lot on Saturday and it got some pretty weird lines in it. It dried out super hard for Sunday and it's definitely cool winning on a brutal track like that. The main thing I am thinking now is to win on the gnarly tracks in Europe.

Motocross Illustrated: Winning two GPs, a lot of Americans have won GPs, you are the 34th American to win a GP. There are some pretty impressive names ahead of you. Broc Glover, Johnny O'Mara, Jim Pomeroy and Marty Smith have three wins, and guys like Ricky Johnson, Jeff Stanton and Tallon Vohland have four wins. Would it be a goal to pass those guy, and move up the all-time winner list for American riders?

Covington: I haven't really thought about it until you mentioned it to me. I am not really a guy going for records or anything like that, I just want to go out and get the best results I can get. Not going for records, my main goal is really just the championship, that is all I am working for.

Motocross Illustrated: Now you are back in Europe, and all those ridiculously long flights are over and you don't have to live out of a suit-case, does that feel good? Holland this coming weekend and then Italy for the GP.

Covington: Yes, I will ride the Dutch championship this weekend. Yes, for sure, you can get back into your normal rhythm, but it's the same for everybody. I really enjoyed going home for a couple of weeks before Mexico. I have always liked the fly-away GPs, even though the travel does kind of suck sometimes, but it's the cool and unique things about racing the GPs. Coming back to Europe the season is fully starting. It will be nice to get back to my apartment in Lommel and get into a good routine.

Motocross Illustrated: You mentioned the travel, and you couldn't have had four more different countries to visit. How did you find the experiences and was there a stand-out as far as the cultural thing?

Covington: I think Indonesia, that was the one that stood out the most, and not necessarily in a positive way, but it was a new place and I had never been there before. The weather was unfortunate and unlucky, I will remember that one for a while. I have never ridden a track that was so gnarly. Qatar and Argentina, I like both those tracks and Argentina is my favourite Grand Prix of the year and me and my dad spent a couple of days after the race going fly-fishing. We will probably do that again next year. It was a trip of a life-time.

Motocross Illustrated: Your dad and mum were in Mexico. How nice is that

SH

to have your parents there while the American national anthem is being played and you are on top of the podium?

Covington: Yes, for sure. My parents get over to several races each year, so it's not that big a deal, but for sure nice having them there when the national anthem is playing and I am on top of the podium. That was the best moment of the weekend for sure.

Motocross Illustrated: Obviously, the talk about MXsports and Youthstream having the deal to run the USGP. With it being held at Gaterback, that seems like a track you would like, and I am guessing you raced there a bit as an amateur?

Covington: Yes, for sure. I mean, I never had a huge amount of success there, I won a few amateur titles there. I really love going down there and the track is really awesome. It will be really cool going back there. I have a lot of memories there and spent thanksgiving (Winter Nationals) there every years since I was like five or six years old. It will be fun going there.

Motocross Illustrated: Saying that, you have won Mexico twice, but having ridden Gaterback, and it's going to be warm that time of year. Can you look forward to that already, or is it too far away to think about?

Covington: It's a long way away, and I haven't thought about it, but I was stoked when somebody mentioned it would be there. I am just trying to concentrate on these European GPs.

Motocross Illustrated: Last question. You moved up the standings with your win. Do you have a goal for the next few rounds, or just do the best you can?

Covington: I don't have a goal, I am just going to try and get as many points as I can and hope for the best. There are plenty of racing coming up in the next few months to get back to the front in the points.

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Reach for the Top

Story Geoff Meyer images Ray Archer

A couple of years ago, Rockstar Energy Husqvarna rider Gautier Paulin was considered the heir apparent to Antonio Cairoli. His form was brilliant and his results continued to improve. Changes though to first Kawasaki, then Honda seemed to stall his progress somewhat, and now with Husqvarna, he is working hard to return to the very top of the MXGP points standings.

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“Everything is coming together for us and it feels really rewarding to get on the podium. We’ve made big improvements with the bike and I’ve also managed to improve my starts. We were strong throughout the weekend in Mexico. From the time practice to the qualifying heat and the final motos we were always inside the top three. In moto one I made a good start and managed to cross the line in third. My start was even better in moto two. Despite feeling a bit tired I managed to get a good race pace to end up third again. I can’t thank all my team enough for all their hard work. I’m having fun on my bike at the moment and our goal now is to consistently battle for the podium at each GP.”

In Argentina three weeks ago, the Frenchman scored 6-4 results and was more than happy with his form. A lot of testing, and more confidence in his bike, the multiple GP winner enjoyed his weekend in Argentina.

“The feeling is great on my bike at the moment. We’ve made some good progress since the start of the season so the results are slowly coming our way. I know we can do even better and this is our goal for the following GPs. In the opening moto it took me a while to get a good race pace. I ended up sixth but I was really close to the top three. Then in the second moto I had a better start and found myself battling for second place. We had some great battles and I crossed the line in fourth for fourth overall at the GP. Everybody in our team are doing a great job and I’m really looking forward to the next GP. We are in the right position now to go fight for the top in our class and this is what we’re going to do in Mexico.”

A couple of weeks earlier though it was another story, as heavy rain, and even heavier mud saw him finish a lowly 13th overall, from the single moto run.

“Overall, I’m satisfied with our results in Indonesia. The first and only moto we raced was more like a gamble and you had to remain focused and patient. The key for me was to keep going and not get stuck in the mud. Line choice was also crucial as in most places you could not tell how deep the ruts could be. I take my 13th place and move on. It is an OK result and I was happy we headed back to Europe for some more training and testing with the team.”

In Qatar at the opening round of the series Paulin looked sharp, just as all his Husqvarna team-mates looked, and like in the third round in Argentina, he performed with solid and consistency (6-5).

“I was really satisfied with my performance in Qatar. To start the season with two consistent moto results for sixth overall is hugely important. It just shows there’s a great base for us to continue working during the season. The weekend started with a good third place result during qualifying. It was a good confidence booster for the rest of the GP. My bike has been working great throughout the weekend as well. In moto one I made a small mistake after the start and had to fight from the back of the pack to finish sixth. If I hadn’t lost time at the start, I believe a top three result was well within our reach. Then in moto two I didn’t get a great start but made some quick passes and found myself in fifth. Getting some consistent lap times I managed to finish fifth.”

Now its onto Trentino, a circuit that suits the Frenchmans smooth style, and should again give him a bag full of points.

Can he gain his fitrst GP win in a long time, or will he again have to watch the young gun Tim Gajser contonue to build momentum?

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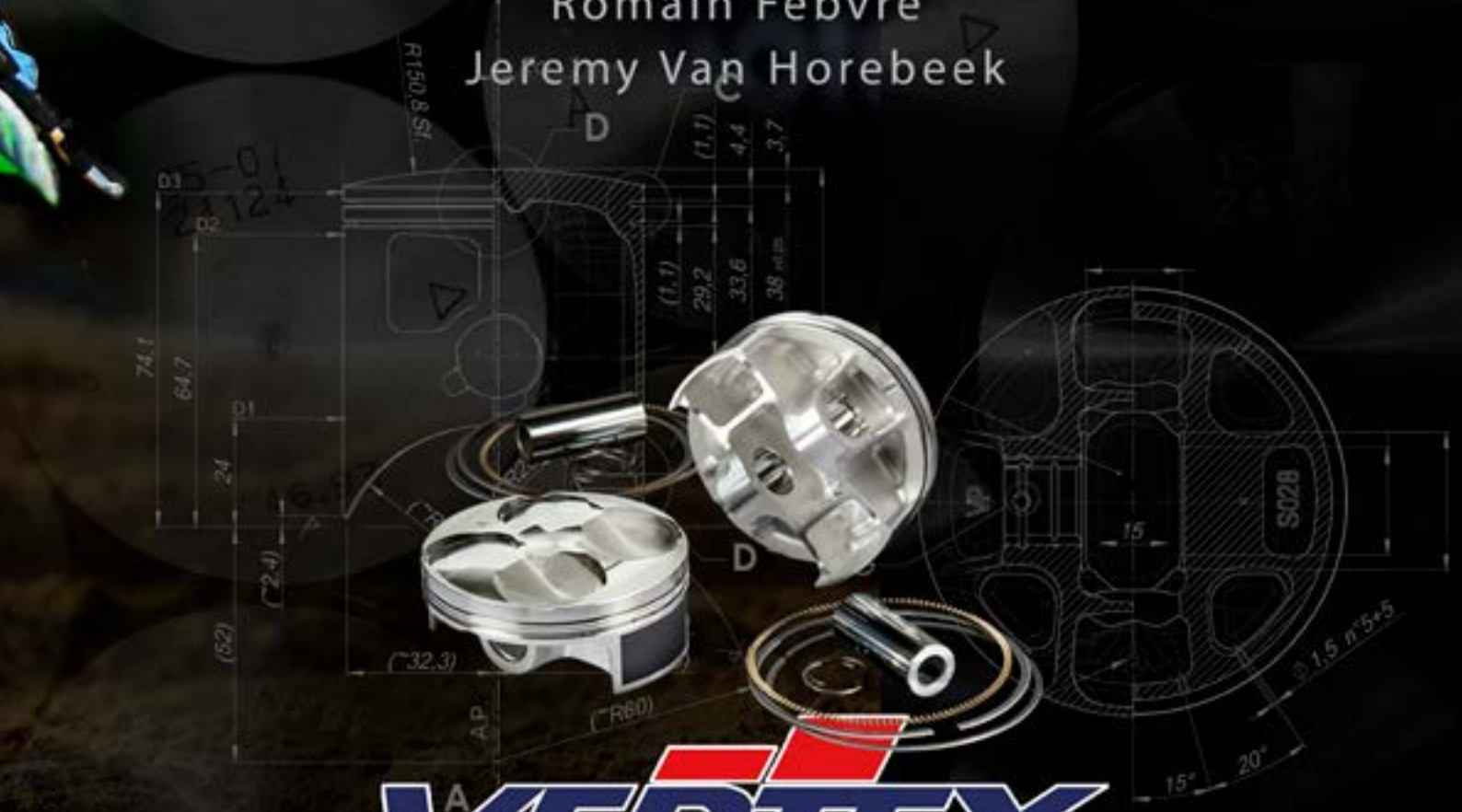

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